NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5972 JULY 10, 1978
MARK HOPKINS/BERLIN

SUMMITS -- BERLIN WALL

ANNCR:

WHEN HE VISITS WEST BERLIN DURING HIS TRIP TO WEST GERMANY, PRESIDENT CARTER WILL SEE THE WALL THAT HAS DIVIDED BERLIN SINCE AUGUST THIRTEENTH, NINETEEN SIXTY ONE, WHEN SOVIET LEADER NIKITA KRUSHCHEV ORDERED THE BARRIER BUILT TO STOP DEFECTIONS OF GERMANS UNDER SOVIET OCCUPATION. VOA'S MARK HOPKINS REPORTS FROM BERLIN.

VOICE:

IT IS NOT JUST A WALL NOW. IT IS A DEATH STRIP MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED METERS WIDE AT SOME POINTS, SEPARATING THE SOVIET SEGMENT OF BERLIN FROM THOSE OF THE WESTERN ALLIES. AND FEW EAST GERMANS SURVIVE ATTEMPTS TO CROSS EITHER FROM EAST TO WEST GERMANY.

PRESIDENT CARTER WILL SEE THE ORIGINAL BERLIN WALL THAT EAST GERMAN WORKERS, GUARDED BY ARMED SOVIET TROOPS, BEGAN BUILDING ON AUGUST THIRTEENTH. PARTS OF IT ARE BRICK. OTHERS ARE MADE OF CONCRETE BLOCK. SECTIONS OF BUILDINGS ARE INCORPORATED INTO THE WALL THAT WAS HASTILY ERECTED AND TOPPED WITH BROKEN GLASS TO PREVENT PEOPLE FROM ESCAPING.

EAST GERMANY BEGAN MODERNIZING THE WALL AROUND NINETEEN SEVENTY, AND IT NOW CONSISTS OF SEVERAL PARTS. A NEWER WALL, MADE OF PRECAST CONCRETE SLABS, HAS BEEN ERECTED BEHIND THE ORIGINAL WALL. THE NEW BARRIER IS ABOUT TWELVE METERS HIGH AND TOPPED WITH A CONCRETE TUBE THAT IS DIFFICULT TO GRASP. BEHIND THIS, IF ONE IS LOOKING FROM WEST BERLIN, ARE CLEARED AREAS, PLANTED WITH LAND MINES. THERE ARE WIRE FENCES AND BARBED WIRE. THE EAST GERMAN BORDER POLICE LOOK DOWN FROM TOWERING WATCHPOSTS ONTO TANK TRAPS, AND VICIOUS DOGS THAT ARE ALLOWED TO RUN ON LONG CHAINS. THE WHOLE DEATH STRIP IS BRIGHTLY LIT AT NIGHT.

ANYONE WHO IS SKILLFUL OR LUCKY ENOUGH TO CLIMB A FIRST WALL ON THE EAST BERLIN SIDE, THEN TO TREAD THROUGH MINED AREAS, AND BARBED WIRE IS A TARGET FOR EAST GERMAN SHARPSHOOTERS. AND EVEN IF THEY MISS, IT IS PRACTICALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO SURMOUNT THE FINAL TWO WALLS THAT BLOCK THE WAY TO WEST BERLIN AND FREEDOM.
SO ALMOST NO ONE ESCAPES NOW FROM EAST BERLIN BY GOING THROUGH THE WALL. EAST GERMANY ENGINEERS HAVE METHODICALLY CREATED A BARRIER THAT STOPS ALL BUT THE RARE FEW.

-0-

JS/RTD